**Joint Arrowsic-Georgetown Broadband Committee Minutes**

**September 17, 2015**

On September 17 about 40 residents from Arrowsic and Georgetown met to explore options for improving access to fast and reliable internet service for both communities. Participants shared frustrations with current levels of service and discussed business implications of substandard internet service. Many reported added business costs, such as renting an office in Bath to conduct video conferencing and data transfer. Several noted they would telecommute, have home-based businesses or a larger client base if better internet service were available. Property managers and realtors reported the difficulties of selling or renting properties when high-speed internet service is unavailable. Other issues included the impediments to offering or enrolling in on-line courses, or taking advantage of remote medical monitoring.

The meeting then addressed obstacles to improving internet service. A key problem is referred to as “the last mile conundrum.” Fiber optic cable runs along Route 1, the “middle mile.” Extending access to it down the “last mile” to residences in Arrowsic and Georgetown is the challenge. The cable that runs along Route 1 was built by the 3-Ring Binder Project. Because it was funded by public resources, it is designated as open access (meaning the network’s physical infrastructure is available for rent to any company that wants to sell services to the public, allowing for more competition than if each provider is required to build their own network to compete). The builder (Maine Fiber Company) leases space to other service providers (like GWI) at competitive rates. Fairpoint extended fiber optic cable almost the full length of Arrowsic and Georgetown. This was also funded in part with public resources, via a grant from the Maine Schools and Libraries Network, and is therefore open access. That cable is about 90% underutilized. The only direct connections are Georgetown School, GHS Library, and Richards Library. Expanding access to the Fairpoint cable would require additional switching stations and equipment, additional cable (to reach premises or other sites), and fees to Central Maine Power for rights to attach cable and equipment to poles. The cost just of running the cable is estimated at $30,000 per mile – hence the conundrum.

Many Maine towns are trying to upgrade their broadband access. New coalitions, businesses and funding possibilities are emerging. Maine Broadband Coalition is an informal federation of public policy professionals, educational institutions, businesses, non-profit organizations and individuals concerned about Maine’s economic future. (www.MaineBroadbandCoalition.org). Tilson Technology is a Maine-based company working with several communities to plan and launch broadband strategies. Redzone is a Maine-based company providing LTE wireless broadband access through existing cellular network. Jim Davis of Arrowsic introduced the possibility of building a cell tower on his property and renting space to companies such as Redzone. ConnectME is Maine’s grant funding authority for broadband upgrades (http://maine.gov/connectme/). It has money for planning as well as physical upgrade projects, although to be eligible a project must result in broadband performance of 10/10 – meaning 10 megabits/second download and 10 gigabits/second upload. (In Arrowsic today, DSL performance is roughly 2.5 mps down and < 1mps up, but varies depending on time of day and distance from switch.)

Following the discussion of problems and challenges, those attending the meeting then formed several teams. The Technology Team is preparing an infrastructure baseline and evaluating technology options for broadband upgrade. The Planning Team is exploring support for the project planning. The Communications and Outreach Team is tasked with building broad support for an upgrade, as high adoption rates are critical to potential funders. The Internet Needs Survey Team is undertaking the first essential task of assessing the range and depth of broadband needs in Arrowsic and Georgetown. A survey has been developed and is now available online at http://survey.ag-broadbanders.org/ Paper copies of the survey are also available at both Town Halls.

The next meeting of the Arrowsic-Georgetown Broadband Group is November 19, 2015 at the Georgetown Historical Society Building, 20 Bay Point Road, Georgetown.